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DE RUEHLM #0651/01 1770931
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
P 260931Z JUN 09
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0163
INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7015
RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY 3899
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3149
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 8775
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 1763
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3617
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1255
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RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI//J3/J332/J52//
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SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INS AND PRM
STATE ALSO PASS TO USAID
AID/W FOR ANE/SCA
AID/W FOR DCHA/FFP FOR JDWORKEN, JBORNS
AID/W FOR DCHA/OFDA FOR ACONVERY, RTHAYER AND RKERR
BANGKOK FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA WBERGER
KATHMANDU FOR USAID/DCHA/OFDA MROGERS AND POL SBERRY
USMISSION GENEVA FOR NKYLOH
USUN FOR ECOSOC DMERCADO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: EAID PREF PGOV PHUM CE
SUBJECT: SRI LANKA: THE VAVUNIYA GOVERNMENT AGENT

REF: A) Colombo 637, B) Colombo 623

SUMMARY

¶1. (SBU) On June 18, Charge, with USAID's Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (USAID/OFDA) regional advisor and information officer met with Mrs. P.S.M. Charles, the Government Agent (GA) of Vavuniya District. When asked how the transition from military to civilian control of the IDP camps was progressing, the GA implied that she has little authority or influence over what goes on in Manik Farm. However, it was apparent from this meeting and from visiting the camps that she and her district staff have had a major hand in what is going on there. While relations between the GA and the Competent Authority (CA), Major General Chandrasiri, are strained, Mrs. Charles has nevertheless begun to transform the camps into the "welfare villages" (Zone 0 and Zone 1) that she was charged with establishing at the end of 2008. The GA is optimistic that many IDPs will soon be able to return to areas in Vavuniya District, in particular to the southern half of the district, which will not require a significant de-mining effort. Improvements seen in Manik Farm over the past few weeks notwithstanding, the camps are not up to international humanitarian "Sphere" standards. The CA's efforts to decongest the camps, however, should help raise standards by significantly reducing population pressures. Until the CA completes his mission in Manik Farm, the GA will continue to work in the background to improve conditions in the camps. Charge and the USAID/OFDA regional advisor believe that the GA is well positioned to assume camp management responsibilities when the CA's "camp building" operation is over, hopefully in the next two months. End summary.

MILITARY OR CIVILIAN CONTROL

¶2. (SBU) On June 18, Charge and the USAID/OFDA regional advisor and information officer met with Vavuniya GA Mrs. P.S.M. Charles. When asked how the transition from military to civilian authority was progressing, Mrs. Charles remained silent. It was obvious, however, by her shifting posture that, for practical purposes, this transition is not occurring. She gave the distinct impression that she did not like the CA intruding on her territory. The GA became

animated when she said that she did not need the CA to set up and run the camps. The GA pointed out that she was the one who created the original welfare villages in Zone 0 and Zone 1 at the end of 2008. The GA stated emphatically that Manik Farm had been a jungle, and that she was the one who was responsible for clearing the land, building the houses and for the healthcare facilities, water, schools, and post office. The CA, for his part, did not come into the picture until April 24, 2009 when he was officially appointed under emergency law and given responsibility for coordinating and implementing all assistance provided to IDPs. The GA made clear, without saying it, that the CA's departure could not happen soon enough. (Note: The CA has informed the U.N. in Vavuniya that the camps should be completed in two months. Humanitarian agencies anticipate that the CA's involvement in day-to-day camp management will turn over to the GA at that time.)

MANIK FARM EVOLVING

13. (SBU) It has only been five weeks since more than 100,000 IDPs were transported from the Omanthai transit site to Manik Farm. The international humanitarian effort to provide sufficient tents, latrines, water points, food, and communal kitchens is fresh in everyone's mind. However, the U.N., international and local NGOs, and the GSL have made an extraordinary effort to set up the infrastructure to begin to meet basic needs. Now, 35 days after the conflict ended, Manik Farm is rapidly evolving. It is not the kind of IDP camp that one expects to see five weeks after the conclusion of an armed conflict and large displacement. Although the GA might speak and act as if she has little authority or influence over what goes on in Manik Farm, it is obvious from visiting the camps that she and her district staff have had a major hand in the camp's development. The district's efforts can be seen everywhere in the camps.

GA IMPACT ON MANIK FARM

14. (SBU) In five short weeks electrical power lines are running through the zones, a public address system is in place, and learning spaces have been created and are being used. The district Water Supply and Drainage Board is finishing laying six-inch diameter pipes underground to create a distribution network throughout the zones with the goal of providing 40 liters of water a day per IDP, 25 liters above international humanitarian "Sphere" standards. The district Road Development Department plans to address drainage issues for Zones 0, 1, 3, 4 and 5. The U.N. Office for Project Services (UNOPS) plans to address drainage issues in Zone 2. With GA approval, co-ops are opening to sell general merchandise and food and Keels - one of the largest grocery chains in Sri Lanka - plans to open food stalls and supply mobile shops. Mobile bakeries are operating and fish is being trucked in from Mannar. (Note: Contrary to the CA's claim, Ref B, the GA made it clear that she - not the CA - was the one who approved the co-op shops). Agents from the district health department are in the zones spraying for mosquitoes and flies and organizing IDPs to pick up and dispose of the garbage that is strewn everywhere. Mobile ATM vans crisscross the zones and small businesses like barber shops are opening. The GA is implementing vocational training - including dressmaking, tailoring, electrical work, and computers - which will soon be available to IDPs. In addition, the GA plans to set aside low-lying areas in the camps for cultivation so IDPs can grow their own food under the supervision of district agricultural agents.

RETURNS TO VAVUNIYA DISTRICT

15. (SBU) The GA is optimistic, however, that many IDPs will soon be able to return to areas of Vavuniya District. According to the GA, the southern part of the district will not require a significant de-mining effort. The GA believes that many IDPs could be relocated soon to this area. The northern area, however, is a high-risk area and she indicated that the U.N. Mine Action Group was planning to do an assessment of the area in coming weeks. The GA commented that the only areas in the district that would be off-limits to IDP returns would be a few small high-security areas that border the northern section. The GA added that there are 21 amputees in the district that could provide information on the location of mines and that IDPs in the camps could also be asked to provide information on where mines were placed. The GA also acknowledged that some IDPs

would be unable to return to areas of origin until de-mining operations were completed.

MANIK FARM - NOT UP TO STANDARDS

¶6. (SBU) Improvements seen in Manik Farm over the past few weeks, however, in no way imply that the camps are up to international humanitarian "Sphere" standards. Water is still in short supply in many areas of Manik Farm, especially in blocks far from the road. The ratio of latrines per person is still high and IDPs continue to live in severely overcrowded temporary shelters. The lines at the few primary health clinics and referral hospitals that are operating are long and people are still dying in the camps from preventable causes. IDPs are still defecating in open areas and stagnant pools of water and piles of garbage are breeding grounds for disease. Much remains to be done over the next few months to stabilize the camps and significantly raise living conditions to meet international humanitarian "Sphere" standards before the monsoon season, which is expected to begin in October.

DECONGESTING THE CAMPS

¶7. (SBU) The CA's efforts to decongest the camps, long advocated by the international community, should help raise standards by significantly reducing population pressures. Zone 2, the most crowded zone in Manik Farm with an estimated 75,000 IDPs, is projected to be down to 30,000 or so in a few weeks. The CA has recently announced that he plans to split zones 1, 3, and 4 into 2 blocks to help speed up decongestion. He also indicated that the first part of the new Zone 6 would be ready for shelters in a couple of weeks. The CA also recently announced that two new zones, 9 and 10, are being planned and that the local NGO Sewalanka will start construction on 900 semi-permanent shelters on or around June 26. The CA emphasized at the June 22 U.N., INGO, NGO coordination meeting that they needed to speed up decongestion in order to create space for home gardening.

¶8. COMMENT (SBU): Until the CA completes his mission in Manik Farm, the GA will continue to work in the background to improve conditions in the camps. Although the GA stated that she is the only district official allowed entry into the camp, it is obvious that the relevant district departments have made gains that have significantly improved camp infrastructure and services. The GA might not be directly involved in day-to-day camp management activities and decisions about site section and such, but Charge and the USAID/OFDA regional advisor believe that she is well positioned to assume these responsibilities when the CA steps aside. Although the GA may resent the CA intruding on her territory, she has managed to work around him or with his tacit approval to start transforming the camps into something that resembles the welfare villages that she established in Zone 0 and 1. In the end, they both perhaps share a similar objective - to transform Manik Farm from an IDP camp - which is currently the second most populous city in Sri Lanka - into semi-permanent, self-contained welfare villages. The CA's intentions, though, are most likely motivated by the security imperative to pacify the population as it waits behind fences to return home. The CA informed the U.N. in Vavuniya that the majority of IDPs will remain inside the camps for the next six months. The GA, though, a Tamil herself, is most likely motivated by the humanitarian imperative to provide infrastructure that supports the IDPs' physical, social, and cultural needs as they await their release.

MOORE